

'ARIYAR' IN ANCIENT TAMIL LITERATURE

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Ever since the advent of 'Aryans' in Indian history, the word 'Aryan' has assumed significant and farfetching linguistic and racial connotations. Then came the advent of 'Dravidians'. CALDWELL's linguistic invention was given a racial twist by the western and Indian scholars, though the concept of race and language are two separate entities. Leaving these hypotheses and theories aside, an attempt is made in this paper to study the word '*Ariyar*' found in the ancient Tamil literature, popularly known as Tamil Sangam literature. In the process of understanding the past, there have been persistent and inconsistent attempts in historiography to import later day ideas, concepts and theories to reflect back on the past events leading to diversified and contradicting situation. But, here the approach has been restricted to get the meaning of the word '*Ariyar*' as found in the ancient Tamil literature.

In the ancient Tamil literature, the words *Ariyar*, *Ariyan*, *Ariya* etc. are found in various places with their other forms and have been used both as nouns and adjectives. As in recent times, diametrically opposite views have been expressed¹ about the inclusion of the Tamil epics *Cilappatikaram* and *Manimekalai* within the ambit of Sangam Literature, the discussion is restricted to *Ettutogai* (the eight anthologies), *Pattuppattu* (the ten poems) and *Padinen Kizh Kanakku* (the eighteen minor works). Now let us see what these poems say about '*Ariyar*'.

Nattrinai : It is heading the list of *Ettutogai* and its general theme is love. The word '*Ariyar*' appears in the 170th poem, sung by an unknown poet. A companion of the heroine of the poem warns that the hero might be seduced by the beautiful lonely dancing girl. She compares the victory of the virali (the dancer), who came to a festival clad in a leaf-garment, over her group to the fact

that at the famous town of Mullur, the *Ariya* soldiers swarmed, but ran away before the lance-battalion of *Malayan* (a *Cheran*), who unsheathed his shining sword and attacked with his large army. From this² we can see that the people who came from the north to attack *Cheras* were known as '*Ariyar*'.

Kuruntogai : Literally meaning 'a collection of short poems', it comes next and its theme is also love. The word '*Ariyar*' appears in the verse 7, line 3. Here, it is described how *Ariyars* dance on a tied rope according to the beatings of a drum. "The forest full of bamboos where rattle the white ripe seeds of shivering *vakai* tree (*Śriṣa* tree) tossed by the wind like the drumming of the *Ariyar* dancing on the rope". Therefore, here it is evident that '*Ariyar*' refers to a group of jugglers or tumblers who perform acrobatics.

Paditrupattu (the Ten Tens) : It gives more information about '*Ariyar*' in historical setting. The entire extant collection of poems deals with the deeds and exploits of the *Chera* king. The first and tenth tens are not available. In second tens, the *patigam* (preface) describes how *Imayavarambam Nedunjeraiadan* engraved his royal sign 'bow', which figured on his flag, on the top of the *Himālayas* (lines 4 to 7). Having roaring oceans as his boundaries (*imizh kadal velittamizhugam*), he ruled *Tamil-gum* (the Tamil country) in such a way as to excel the other *nāḍus* (countries). He made '*Ariyar*' bow before him, who were having very great name, fame and heritage.

In second ten, the eleventh verse details how the very famous *Himālayas* abound with '*Ariyars*'. Hence scholars give two different meanings for the word '*Ariyar*' : 1. *Ariyar* = *munivar* (*Rishis*) and 2. *Ariyar* = *Ariya mannar* (*Aryan kings*). The hill-side was resplendent with densely

and well grown trees of *erithrina indica* (*mulmurukka*) or a kind of citrus, and the yak sleeping there would dream of waterfalls and sweet smelling grass. The Himālayas with such fertility was filled with many *Rishis*. In between the Himālayas (in the north) and Kumārī in the south, there were kings who boasted of their valour, but they were conquered by Nedujeraladan. The meaning is thus rendered, "You quelled the valour of those who called themselves monarchs of the land between Comorin in the south and the famous Himālayas where the Āryas abound and yak sleeps on the hills covered thick with the Olean-der and dreams of the broad mountain streams and the narandam (lemon-grass)".

In fifth Ten, the *patigam* mentions '*vadavar*', i. e., the people of north and '*Ariya Anna*' i. e., head of Ariya kings. It describes how the kings of the north were afraid of Kadal Pirakkotiya Senguttuvan. He marched with his army to bring a good stone for chiselling an image of the goddess of chastity. He came across a head or chief of Ariya kings, while passing through forests, and defeated him. Then, he brought a stone and washed it in the waters of the Ganges. While coming back, he stayed at Irumbil, destroyed Viyulur and Kodungur. He also killed a king named Pazhaiyan.

In the same Fifth Ten, the 43rd verse mentions the defeat of kings who were ruling between the Himālayas in the north and Kumārī in the south as boundaries. However, the names of the kings or the countries thus defeated are not given in the poem. In the *patigam*, the kings are called '*vadavar*' (the kings of north), the Chiefs of Ariyar are called '*Ariya Anna*', but here they are generally mentioned as the '*Ayidai arasar*', i. e., the kings in between the Himālayas and Kumārī.

In Seventh Ten, the 68th poem narrates how the people who were living in the north or northern direction, were leading a fearless and happy life. The expression used to denote them is '*vadapula vazhnar*'.

So from the description of Paditruppattu, we can see that '*Ariyar*' are 'the kings of the north', '*Rishis* of the Himālayas', 'the kings between the boundaries of Himālayas and Kumārī' and 'the people of the north or northern direction of Tamilagam'.

Agananuru (or *Neduntogai*) : It also gives more details about '*Ariyar*'. Ariyars capture elephants by the

use of trained female elephants. A public woman takes a vow that she would chain her hero with her hair just as the *ariyar* make the wild elephant domesticated with the she-elephant. Mullaippattu throws further light on their employment by the kings of Tamilanadu to train elephants.

In another poem, a harlot wishes that her bangles may be broken just like the army of Ariyars, which was defeated by the Kurumba bowmen who fought under the Cholas, with their shower of arrows, victorious spears and the black buckler. Here also, the names of the defeated Ariyars are not given, but it is mentioned that they were defeated at Vallam (Tanjore).

Paranar in his poem³ eulogises Senguttuvan that he attacked the Ariyar so as to make them scream, carved his royal emblem bow on the very famous, ancient and well grown Northern mountain and chained the ferocious Kings. Here one can notice that the name of the mountain is not specified and it is mentioned in singular. As Himālayas are always mentioned in plural to denote a chain of mountains, a doubt arises whether the poet actually alludes to the Himālayas or to a certain 'very famous, ancient and well grown' mountain situated north of Tamilagam in those days.

Agam. 386 narrates how an *ariya* wrestler was defeated by one Panan. The *Ariya* wrestler was known as '*Ariya Porunan*' and Panan was another wrestler, whose state was in the north of Tamilagam (*Agam*. 325). Panan wrestled with Ariya Porunan and crushed his shoulders and arms, the sight of which made Kanaiyan, the commander of Chera army, feel ashamed.

Agam. 398 describes how rain protects and causes to flourish the region of the tall mountain of the Ariyar, where gold is found. In the poem, the heroine's native place full of flower groves is compared to the above region of the mountain. Here also the name of the mountain is not mentioned.

So, according to *Agananuru*, '*Ariyar*' were the people who captured and trained elephants, who got defeated by the Cholas at Vallam, who were the kings of the north conquered and chained by Senguttuvan and who were in possession of a mountain where gold was available. As there was a wrestler known as '*Ariya Porunan*', the name should imply either that he was an *Ariya* or he had come from the north. But, it should be noted that

Panan, who defeated Ariya Porunan and came from a state situated north of Tamilagam, was not given the prefix of 'Ariya'. Therefore it is evident that there were Ariya wrestlers, just like Ariya jugglers, tumblers or rope dancers, elephant catchers and trainers in Tamilagam.

Purananuru : In one poem⁴, Kovur Kizhar, a Tamil poet, describes how the kings of north were so afraid of Cholan Nalangilli that they were spending their nights without sleep. Marudinala Naganar, another poet⁵ describes how Pandiyan Kudakarattuttunjiya Maran Vazhudi was having a chariot to wage a fierce war to kill the kings of north (*vadapula mannar*). Actually, the poet eulogises Maran Vazhudi who is said to have caused 'northern kings to fade'. But particulars about the names of such northern kings or countries and the place or places where he defeated them in the battles are not at all given. There is a mention⁶ of a type of a sandal paste of 'northern mountain' (*vadakundrattuchandanam*). *Agananuru* also refers to this.⁷ But here also the name of the northern mountain is not mentioned. The important point to be noted is, though the expressions '*vadapulattarasar*', '*vadapulamannar*' and '*vadakundram*' are used to denote the kings of the north and northern mountain, the prefix 'Ariya' is conspicuously missing. Therefore, it is very clear that there were northern kings and northern mountains other than Ariya kings of north and northern mountain of 'Ariyar'.

Non-Tamilian people of North : In the case of non-Tamilian people, specific names have been mentioned like *Kosars*, *Moriyar*, *Nandar*, *Tondaiyar* and *Vadugar*. *Kosars* belonged to Tulu country and they were living south of the Vindhya and near the shores of western ocean. *Nandas* and *Moriyars* are no others but the *Nandas* and *Mauryas* of north India. *Tondaiyars* were having Vengadam as their territory in the south and the land of vadugars in the North. *Tondaiyars* found that the forests of Vengadam were full of elephants. So they went on expeditions, captured, trained and formed them into a brigade. The trained elephants brought firewood to the *Rishis* and they ate the food of their country only. From this, we can infer that *Tondiyars* were having similar vocation like *Ariyars*, as far as elephants are concerned. *Vadugars* were having their lands beyond Vengadam and they spoke a different language. Another point to be noted is that at one place (*Agam*. 378), the *Vadugars* are de-

noted as '*vada Vadugars*'. The term '*vadugars*' connotes that they were from the north and hence the expression '*vada Vadugars*' is very significant, as it actually denotes 'northern group of northerners'. This can be compared with the expression '*vada Ariyar*' and '*vada variyar*' denoting 'northern Ariyar', but such expressions are found in *Silappatikaram* and not in Tamil literature taken for discussion. But the important point to be noted is the usage of 'Ariyar'. While the word 'Ariyar' is generally used to denote the people of north or the kings of north, the above mentioned words *Kosars*, *Nandars*, *Moriyars*, *Tondaiyars* and *Vadugars* are used to denote only particular groups of people who lived in the north of Tamilagam.⁸⁻¹²

Arya and Ariya suffixes and prefixes : Epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidences are abundant to show that the Sātavāhanas were ruling in the north of Tamilagam with their intruding territories extended upto Cuddalore. The important point which should be mentioned here is that the 'Arya' endings in the names of the donees are found only in grants coming from the territory immediately south of river Krishnā (the Kondamudi, the Mayadavolu, the Hira Hadagalli, the Kanteru-Nandivarman I and the Mattapad grants). 'Arya' (venerable) as an honorific prefix to the names of Buddhist and Jaina teachers and saints occurs in inscriptions all over India. Indeed the Tamil epic *Manimekalai* mentions Buddha as 'Ariyan' (25-6). 'Arya' as an honorific title is found in the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela.¹³ 'Arya' as initial part of personal names occurs in a Junnar inscription (*Ayama*),¹⁴ and in the Nagarjunakonda inscription¹⁵ (*Ayakotusiri* and *Ayasiri*, names of royal ladies). 'Aryadeva' is the name of the celebrated disciple of Nāgārjuna (3rd century A. D.), who spent a greater part of his life in Āndhradeśa.¹⁶ But the earliest inscription to exhibit names with 'Arya'-ending is the Kondamudi grant of Jayavarman (3rd century A. D.), where all donees have names ending in 'aja', as also found in the same manner in the Mayadavolu and Mattapad grants.

'Ajjā' is another form of Prākṛit 'Ayya', Sanskrit 'Arya' and Tamil 'Ayya', 'Iyya', 'Ayyar', 'Iyer' and 'ariyar'. 'Ariya' or 'Arya' started as an honorific prefix and became a name-ending much the same way as 'śrī' found in many inscriptions. And we can find the same trend in Tamil literature, as in 'Ariya Anna' (Head or chief of Ariya kings) 'Ariya Porunan' (Ariya wrestler), 'Ariya Arasan

Bragattan,¹⁷ (Ariya king named Bragattan) and '*Ariya Arasan Yazh Brahmadattan*'¹⁸ (Ariya king poet Brahmadattan). The word 'Ayyar' or 'Iyer' is found in many places in ancient Tamil Literature including *Tolkappiyam*,¹⁹ which is considered as the oldest extant Tamil work. It is used to represent a teacher, a priest, a saint, a Brāhmaṇa, a superior, a master or a king, with veneration.

'*Arjake*' : A reference to *Periplus* '*Ariaca*' and Ptolemy's '*Ariake*' has to be made, as it has direct bearing on the discussion of '*Ariyar*' of ancient Tamil literature. About the name '*Ariaca*' of the *Periplus*, W. H. SCOFF opines : "This word in the text is very uncertain". LASSEN thinks that the name is properly the Sanskrit 'Latica' (pronounced Larica) and included the land on both sides of the gulf of Cambay.²⁰ Ptolemy (c. 140 A. D.) calls the very first province of Tamil country going down from the north as Limyricce or Dymirike. He and the author of *Periplus* use it only as the name of the Chera territory. The country north of it was to them '*Ariake*', belonging to the Āryas, in the restricted sense of Marāṭhās. Taking the other forms '*Ariake Sadinon*' and '*Ariake of the Pirates*', they could easily have made out that '*Ariake*' referred to the country later known as the Mahārāṣṭra, then ruled over by the Sātakarṇi kings of the Andhra dynasty.²¹ Therefore, it is evident that '*Ariake*' or '*Ariaca*' denotes '*akam*' or 'the country' of '*Ariyar*' who were ruling or living immediately north of Dymirike or Tamilagam.

Himālayas of Ariyar : We have seen how some Tamilian kings marched towards the Himālayas to bring stones or to defeat the kings in between the 'Himālayas' and 'Kumārī', and inscribed their royal emblems on it. Already it has been pointed out that the poets considered 'Himālayas' as a single tall mountain. From various expressions like 'very famous, ancient and well grown' mountain (*Agam*. 396), 'tall mountain with gold' (*Agam*. 398), a big stone (*Puram*. 171) and 'a tall mountain' (*Puram*. 61), even without naming the mountain, it is evident that the poets considered that '*Imaiyam*' or '*Imayam*' was a single mountain situated in the north of Tamilagam. '*Imam*' means snow; that is why the Himālayas are called so. But in the Tamil literature, whenever the name of '*Imayam*' is not mentioned, it is also not mentioned that the 'tall, ancient, very famous and stony' mountain with gold is covered with snow. Everybody knows that the Himalayas are in-

deed very famous, ancient and 'several series of more or less parallel or converging ranges'. Also, the poets have not given the details how the king climbed up the 'Himālayas', cut the required stone, brought it down, etc., except that 'he washed it in the waters of Ganges'. Therefore, it is evident that whenever the name '*Imayam*' is not mentioned, we have to take it as a mountain that was situated in the north of Tamilagam.

Non-Tamilian kings of north : The Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela, a king of Kaliṅga and a contemporary of the third or the fifth king of the Sātavāhana line, is the only epigraphic reference to the kingdoms of the Tamil country after the Aśoka inscriptions. Khāravela ruled Kaliṅga in the first half of the second century B. C. and in the eleventh year of his reign (c. 155 B. C.) is said to have destroyed a confederacy of Tamil states—*Tamiladesa sanghaṭanam*—which was 113 years old at the time and had been a source of danger.²² The Sātavāhanas were ruling, starting with the first king Simuka around 230 B. C., in the north of Tamilagam with the lineage of Kaṇha (207-189 B. C.), Śrī Sātakarṇi I, Sātakarṇi II (c. 166), Hāla (c. A. D. 20-24), Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi (c. 80-104 A. D.), Śrī Yajña Sātakarṇi (c. 170-99) and others. Before that, the Aśokan empire was extending upto Sravana Belgola covering the areas of the Cholas. He died in 232 B. C. and his successor Brīhadratha was killed by Pushyamitra Śuṅga in 185 B. C. The Śuṅga dynasty continued upto 73 B. C. Therefore, during the reign of these kings of north, no Tamil king could have crossed over to Ganges or Himālayas without encountering them. If the Tamil kings would have actually defeated or conquered the kings of north, as mentioned in the Tamil literature, definitely, there would be some cross reference in their inscriptions. But, unfortunately no such reference has been pointed out so far. Moreover, a careful study of ancient Tamil literature clearly shows that the geography of Tamilagam is restricted between *Vengadam* in the north and *Kumārī* in the south. This has been repeatedly mentioned by the poets and the later commentators. Therefore, if any Tamil king had conquered or defeated any Ariyan king or king of north, he might have defeated an Andhra king of his time.

'*Ariyar*' denotes what? : From the foregoing discussion about the word '*Ariyar*' and its forms mentioned in the ancient literature, it is evident that they

would come under the following categories : 'Ariyar' are

1. the people who were living immediately north of Tamilagam or Vadagam.
2. the kings who were ruling immediately north of Tamilagam.
3. the jugglers, tumblers, rope-dancers or acrobats of Tamilagam.
4. the *Rishis* or saints of northern mountain of Tamilagam or Himalayas.
5. the elephant captors or trainers.
6. the groups or kings who waged wars against Tamil kings or chiefs coming from north.
7. the honorific title '*Ariya*' was used to respect certain professionals like wrestlers, poets or king-cum-poets of Tamilagam.

Were the 'Ariyar' foreigners ? : A reference has already been made about non-Tamilian people coming from the north of Tamilagam, who were specifically mentioned as *Kosar*, *Moriyar*, *Nandar*, *Todaiyar* and *Vadugar*. There have been many specific references to Romans and Greeks collectively called as '*yavanar*' by the Tamilians. Their habits, dress, behaviour etc. are clearly described and explained to show that they were foreigners. The word '*milechar*' is specifically found in *Mullaippattu*: "within the elegant well-lit inner apartment, adorned with tiger-chains of skilled workmanship, well-clad dumb *Milechas* (who make themselves understood by signs) attend on the king, who spends a sleepless night absorbed in thought of (coming) battle."²³ The mention about the employment of *milechas* as bodyguards is very significant, because, unless the king had so much of confidence about his safety, he would not have appointed the foreigners as his bodyguards. And if the '*Ariyar*' mentioned were actually *milechas* or foreigners, they would have been described and treated differently by the Tamil poets. Though the poets repeatedly mention that the boundaries of this land were *Himālayas* in the north, *Kumāri* in the south, *Kunakadal* (eastern ocean) in the east and *Kudakadal* (western ocean) in the west and that the '*Ariyar*' were the people or kings of the north of Tamilagam, nowhere they have mentioned that they were foreigners and that they came from outside the boundaries enumerated by them. Except in the references about the encoun-

ters between them and Tamilian kings or chiefs, in all other places they were treated as the people of Tamilagam. Even in the case of battles among Tamil kings, chieftains and particularly *Chera*, *Chola* and *Pandyas*, elaborate details have been given as to how they fought with each other, killed others, destroyed the lands and towns, captured cattle, men and women, collected their booty, seized the crowns and gold (which in turn to be given to the poets) etc. But, surprisingly such details of after-battle exploits and booties are not given in the case of defeat of '*Ariyar*'. So, it is not known why and how they were spared even after their defeat. Many cases of *Sati* committed by the wives of killed Tamilian kings and chieftains have been specifically mentioned. Even *Imayavaramban Nedunjeraladan* fought a war with the contemporary *Chola* king, in which both the monarchs lost their lives and their queens performed *sati*. But, surprisingly, there are no mentions of killing of '*Ariya*' kings and of performing of *sati* by their queens. Therefore, really it is very intriguing as to why and how such benevolent and lenient treatment was given to the defeated, conquered and captured *Ariyan* kings by the Tamil poets and kings. In any case, it is evident that the '*Ariyar*' were not foreigners.

Conclusion : In the study of ancient Tamil literature, with a view to find out the meaning and position of '*Ariyar*' as mentioned in their context, it has been pointed out that '*Ariyar*' were the people or kings of north of Tamilagam and also of Tamilagam considering the various descriptions of them. Literary evidences of the ancient Tamilagam with other epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidences of contemporary kings of *Maurya*, *Kaliṅga* and *Sātavāhana* show that the exploits of Tamil kings were perhaps restricted to the boundaries of the ancient Tamilagam and the defeat of '*Ariya*' or northern king or kings refers to the defeat of *Andhra* king or kings. The word '*Ariya*' was also used as an honorific title to certain professionals, besides the generic usage to denote the people of the land with the boundaries of *Himālayas*, *Kumāri*, east and west oceans. As the names *Kosar*, *Nandar*, *Moriar*, *Tondaiyar* and *Vadugar* have been used to indicate individual groups of north, and the name '*Ariya*' is used to denote the people or kings who were living or ruling immediately in the north of Tamilagam, it is very evident that no racial connotation was given to '*Ariyar*' by the ancient Tamils.

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2. P. T. Srinivas IYENGAR, *op. cit.*, p. 503.
3. *Agananuru*-396 : 16-18.
4. *Purananuru*-31.
5. *Ibid.* 52.
6. *Ibid.* 378.
7. *Agananuru*-340.
8. *Agananuru*-15, 90, 113, 196, 205, 216, 251, 262. *Purananuru*-169, 396. *Kuruntogai*-15, 73.
9. *Puram*-175. *Agam*-69, 281, 251.
10. *Agam*-251 (Nandan), 265 (Nandar).
11. *Agam*-213, *Kuruntogai*-260, *Perumbanatrappadai*-450-54.
12. *Agam*-107, 213, 253, 281, 195, 375, 381. *Kuruntogai*-11.
13. "Aira maharaja kharavela".
14. Archaeological Survey of Western India, vol. iv, p. 103, No. 18.
15. *Ins. L.E.T.* vol. xxi.
16. K. A. Nilakanta SASTRI has interpreted 'Ayamani' as 'Aryadeva'—*Journal of Oriental Research*, XI-13, 96, ff.
17. *Kurinjippattu*, Nachikkiniyar's commentary.
18. He has sung the 184th poem of Kuruntogai.
19. *Tolkappiyam*, III-143.2, 144, 29.
20. Quoted by K. N. Sivaraj PILLAI, *The Chronology of the Early Tamils*, University of Madras, Madras, 1932.
21. P. T. Srinivasa IYENGAR, *op. cit.*, p. 318.
22. K. A. Nilakanta SASTRI, *op. cit.* p. 115.
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Ancient Tamil works consulted (Primary sources)

Ettutogai

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|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Natrinai. | 5. Paripadal. |
| 2. Kuruntogai. | 6. Kalittogai. |
| 3. Ingurunuru. | 7. Agananuru. |
| 4. Paditrupattu. | 8. Purananuru. |

Others

Tolkappiyam.
 Silappadikaram.
 Manimekalai.

Padinenkizhkanakku

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Naladiyar. | 10. Tinaimalainutraimbadu. |
| 2. Porunatrappadai. | 11. Tirukkural |
| 3. Iniyadhu narpadu. | 12. Tirikadugam |
| 4. Inna narpadu. | 13. Asarakovai |
| 5. Kalavazhi narpadu. | 14. Pazhamozhi |
| 6. Karnarpadu. | 15. Sirupanchmulam |
| 7. Indinaiyambadu | 16. Mudumzhikanchi |
| 8. Indinaiyazhubadu. | 17. Eladhi. |
| 9. Tinaimozhiyaimbadu. | 18. Kainilai |

Pattupattu

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| 1. Tirumurugatrappadai | 6. Maduraikanchi |
| 2. Porunatrappadai | 7. Nedunalvadai |
| 3. Sirupanatrappadai | 8. Kurunjippattu |
| 4. Perumbanatrappadai. | 9. Pattinappalai |
| 5. Mullaippattu | 10. Malaipadukadam |